

Male Speaker: Yes, I think the Levisa River has a lot of character to it. As a kid growing up, you always go down to the river and fish. You take your bicycle, your fishing pole, your nightcrawlers, and off you went. On a Friday night or a Saturday night, you'd head out to one of the deepest holes in the river. You'd take a wash tub with you. You'd actually catch enough fish to fill the wash tub up and have fish fry.

Female Speaker: When we were growing up, it was very clean, and we went swimming in it. They had a place they baptized people because there was a nice sandbar there. In fact, I was baptized in the river down there.

MS: Even back when it would freeze solid, you'd actually skate on the river. You didn't have ice skates. You actually just skated with your own shoes. So, the Levisa has a lot of memories to me, not only when she shows her mighty force, but also in the calm and peaceful times. Mud turtles, catching those. Yes, I think the Levisa River has a lot of character to it. As a kid growing up, you always go down to the river and fish. You take your bicycle and your fishing pole and your night crawlers and off you went. On a Friday night or a Saturday night, you'd head out to one of the deepest holes in the river. You'd take a wash tub with you. You'd actually catch enough fish to fill the wash tub up and have fish fry.

FS: When we were growing up, it was very clean, and we went swimming in it. They had a place they baptized people because there was a nice sandbar there. In fact, I was baptized in the river down there.

MS: Even back when it would freeze solid, you'd actually skate on the river. You didn't have ice skates. You actually just skated with your own shoes. So, the Levisa has a lot of memories to me, not only when she shows her mighty force, but also in the calm and peaceful times. Mud turtles, catching those, crawdads. But we lived on the river. We respected it. We enjoyed it. We feared it.

MS: We sat there and just could not believe what was happening. There's no way. When it was waist deep, I was still saying, "This can't be." [laughter] We worked ourselves to death just trying to block our doors to keep the little water from coming through under the door. A few minutes later, it was coming through the windows. I don't know why that it goes up so rapidly, but you could almost watch the water rise.

MS: Well, it was just high water in [19]37. The [19]57 flood, I believe it got up in the basement of this building, but no real damage. It didn't last long. The [19]77 flood was a different story. That got up and just about wiped the town out.

FS: The house was completely surrounded with water, and we went out in a boat. You couldn't keep from being frightened when you would see these huge things washing down from other people's property.

FS: A big span of wood came through this front door. The pressure then burst out a window in the back, and it just siphoned merchandise out the window.

MS: I remember people were all making comments that, "This can't be happening. This can't be happening. This is like a dream. We're like in a dream, a really bad dream." We just couldn't believe that it was doing what it was doing. I was only about ten or eleven years old. I really didn't know what to think, seeing what was left of trailers and homes floating down the river. I remember seeing cars lifting up and floating out over the main channel. The next thing you know, they're gone just as quick as an eye could blink.

MS: Just as soon as there was enough daylight to see the next morning, I came in here and got the camera. It was a pretty sad time to be out making pictures.

MS: At daybreak, the mud was steaming. The mud was about to your knees. If you walked and you put your foot down in it, it would actually suck your shoes right off your feet because it didn't want to let go when you went down into the mud. You walked for two miles in mud. It's hard to stand up. It's slick. So, walking through town, we didn't say a lot, not to each other. You just looked. Everywhere you looked there was more destruction. Cars turned upside down, bridges gone, whole sides of the buildings gone.

MS: I walked down through town. All the wind is in the street level of just about every building, and downtown Grundy was completely blasted out.

MS: I've never been in a war zone, but it looked to me like what one would look like. All the storefronts were gone. There were sandbars in the middle of Main Street. There was still river water running in some places. So, all the businesses were wrecked. The entire downtown retail community was gone.

MS: You couldn't comprehend that this had really happened. It's easy to sit and watch it on TV and watch the other towns and the other people. You say, "Well, kind of feel sorry for those people." But when it's you, your property, or your home or your family or your town, there's no comparison.

MS: But we found that it was a rallying thing with most of the town's people. If you had any goodness in you, it came out at that time.

MS: The only way that you could clean up the mess is for everybody to pitch in and help everyone throughout the community. One day we would work in somebody's house, the next day we'd work in somebody else's house, and so on and so forth. The Mennonites came in and really helped a lot of people. Because people, they had no home. Their homes were gone. The Mennonites would come in and help them rebuild their lives.

MS: People were desperately trying to get clothing, to get food, to get some kind of shelter. People were walking the streets.

FS: But I think I was half crazy [laughter] at the time. I'd stand there and scrape mud and scrub and then all of a sudden, giggle. But no, we were deeply depressed, deeply depressed.

MS: The April [19]77 rainfalls associated with that flood event initiated on the second of April.

Then on the 3rd of April, the greater amount of rainfall began to occur. Then three heavy bursts of rainfall occurred over Western Virginia during the fourth and then also over the fifth. It resulted in about a fifteen-and-a-half-inch maximum rainfall at the center of the storm event with about eight to ten inches of rainfall over the whole drainage basin in upstream of Grundy.

FS: We have packed several times since then. Within the last ten years, it's been in the carport, mud. When it does that, I pack a suitcase, get me some shoes. It doesn't depress me except when it's raining. [laughter] I get a little down [laughter] when it's raining hard.

FS: I'm amazed that some of these people are saying, "We are not going to flood again." How can they say that when I've lived through three of them? They think they can predict there's not going to be another flood.

MS: The ground surface was saturated due to conditions of rainfall occurring prior to the major amount of the rain actually falling on the fourth and the fifth. But in a rainfall of this magnitude of the [19]77 or any flood event, it just runs off because of the saturation of the ground.

MS: A lot of people forget in time. A lot of people don't realize how it was because they've moved into this area.

FS: It will flood here again. Yes. We've even had some people say, "Well, the water table is low." No. That makes no difference. It's our terrain. If we have the rain, we're going to flood. Definitely. It's just a matter of when.

Michael Kline: Please.

Jim Twohig: My name is Jim (Twohig?). I'm project manager for the Grundy Project, Huntington District, Corps of Engineers. As a result of the 1977 flood and a devastation that occurred, Congress in 1981 directed the Corps to study, design, and construct, to prevent such flooding as occurred in [19]77. It named five communities specifically, of which Grundy was one of those five communities. Grundy was the only community in Virginia named, and it is now the only project area for which there is not a project either approved or completed. It became evident that the typical measures that the court looks at to evaluate flood control protection for a community were not going to work for the town of Grundy. We looked at structural alternatives probably about the first four to five years of our study from 1982 to 1986. Those are alternatives that affect the course of the stream or the flooding. We looked at reservoirs, flood walls, open-cut channels, diversion tunnels, and channel-improvement projects. We worked closely with the town council and the mayor looking at these alternatives. I don't think anybody at that time in the early stages of the study ever thought that one of those, or some combination of those, would not work. What we found was that all these measures either did not provide the total protection required for the town of Grundy and were not affordable to either the federal government or to the non-federal sponsor. They were not found to be environmentally sound. Plus, they had devastating impacts on the development we were trying to protect. In 1986, under the Water Resources Development Act of that year, cost sharing was required for flood control projects. The project cost ranged from 200 to \$300 million, of which their share would have been anywhere from twenty-five to fifty percent, including a five percent cash

requirement. So, in working with the town of Grundy and knowing that these were all alternatives that we were facing and with cost sharing here to stay, the town became quickly aware that this was not an affordable solution. In 1987, as a result of our unsuccessful efforts to identify an affordable solution to the flooding problem in Grundy, we began looking at non-structural alternatives. By non-structural alternatives, we include such things as flood-proofing individual structures or evacuating people from the floodplain. But in working with the town of Grundy, we became aware that we were not only going to impact structures, we were going to impact businesses and residences. So, we asked the town of Grundy to develop a taskforce that we could work with. They did that. They named a taskforce. It was represented by business owners there in the town of Grundy. We held our first meeting back in, I think, 1989. It was also at that time that State Delegate Don McGlothlin began to invite the Corps and VDOT to see if there might be some combined project that the two agencies could work on together that would make both possible and reduce cost. In the late [19]80s, we started working with VDOT. At that time, their proposed highway was a bypass of the town of Grundy and did not include any highway improvements through the town. But we asked them to reconsider. We looked at a combined project and determined that if VDOT were to bring their 460 improvement through the town of Grundy rather than around the town of Grundy, that we could possibly overlay the two projects, reduce cost for both, and provide a non-federal cost share sponsor for the town in a flood control project.

MS: The strange thing of it is, even though it's an expensive project, it's actually costing everyone less. Because VDOT, it reduces their cost on the project by working with the Corps. It reduces the town's cost and the Corps of Engineers' cost because the road that will be coming through will act as a levee for the town. That helps the Corps without having to build a flood wall. It helps VDOT by having a place to put the four-lane, and the four-lane's actually the levee. So, it's a genius of a project.

MS: We have an opportunity to have a brand-new town relocated in a protected area. The best thing that I really see is to protect the town from the flood and actually open up the doors with the Virginia Department of Transportation bringing our four-lane through here.

David Hafley: My name is David Hafley, chief of planning with (Booker?) Associates here in Lexington, Kentucky. Grundy is no different than many communities throughout Appalachia that suffer from several things. First of all, they are nestled along a narrow valley floor between steep mountain sides following a water course. Of course, because of that, land area is very valuable. Grundy, over the last sixty or seventy years, has pretty much fully developed, and there are really no sites available for redevelopment within the downtown. When development occurs, then it goes out along the developing commercial corridors or what people commonly call the strip. That causes downtown to be weaker in terms of performance. Parking is also characteristically a troublesome issue in these types of communities. Grundy's done a good job of trying to mitigate that with the development of the parking garage, but parking does remain an issue for Grundy as it does with many other downtowns. Probably one of the biggest issues affecting Grundy is that it has been repeatedly damaged by very serious floods. That has caused some disinvestment in the downtown and lack of new investment in the downtown. As long as Grundy is seen as being under a serious flood threat, I think it can be expected to be a deterrent to a downtown investment. So, we saw Grundy from a physical sense as a nice, attractive,

historic area nestled into the valley floor, but with some very serious physical problems that affected its ability to perform in the marketplace. The buildings were built in the early part of the century. While they were originally well-built structures, they're not very flexible in terms of their adaptability. They're typically two- and three-story structures. They don't have elevators. They've been repeatedly damaged by floods. As a result, they have some problems. Grundy does have what is called trade leakage of approximately \$20 million a year. What that means is that people are not having their goods and services met in the local marketplace but are in fact going out of the county. We want to reverse that and have Grundy not only meet the commercial needs of its residents, but hopefully have people come into the county as a regional center to do their shopping. It will provide opportunity for investment in the downtown, investment that as we have discussed, has historically not taken place within the downtown. We're really designing this site to accommodate both large and small businesses within the redevelopment area. Grundy historically has been a collection of small businesses that have, in different ways, contributed to the economic base of the community. Retailing has changed over the last twenty years. Many of the new retail developments have much larger square footage requirements, much larger parking requirements, and as a result, cannot find a place within the historic downtowns. We want to be able to do both in downtown Grundy. That is, make a good location for businesses that have historically been part of the community and be able to attract retailers of a bigger nature. We think by doing that, it's going to reinforce Grundy as the commercial center of Buchanan County, help Grundy become defined as maybe a regional retailing center within the entire region. In doing so, it will provide a benefit to the small businesses much as the way an anchor store in a mall draws a large number of people who, while they're shopping in that area, also go to many of the smaller specialty or single purpose stores that are located around it. We think that's a real plus to the businesses that decide to relocate from the old downtown over to the redevelopment site. With a large parking garage and the depot site with surface parking areas in the right locations, parking and circulation will be much improved. We have designed the redevelopment site to look out over the historic downtown Grundy to take advantage of the location along the Levisa Fork. Historically, the Levisa Fork has been a threat to Grundy. We want to turn it from a liability into an asset. There are great opportunities for a green corridor along the Levisa Fork in the new heart of downtown Grundy. There are opportunities for public and semi-public uses in terms of a municipal complex, a new location for the teen center, and things that will give people a destination within the downtown. We've looked at residential housing opportunities to really take advantage of the Appalachian School of Law and some of the demand that's going to be created for housing within Grundy. Unlike many downtowns today where, at 5:00 p.m., there is no activity within the downtown, and people go back home; we'll have not only a major commercial center, we'll have public and semi-public functions. We'll have areas of greenery and open space that will draw people after hours who want to relax or visit with family and friends. We have tried very hard to make strong vehicle, pedestrian, and visual connections between the various parts of downtown. The courthouse is a very important architectural-defining element. The Appalachian School of Law with its colonial architecture and facade is one of the important landmark structures in the downtown. We've tried to design the redevelopment area to respond to and reflect some of the historic architecture themes of Southwest Virginia, the Commonwealth, and the colonial architecture. We think that we can take that even further in terms of some of the building facades, streetscape, lighting, some of the pedestrian amenities. So, not only will the redevelopment area be a very functional and attractive commercial center, but it will have an important and identifiable design quality that not

only says we respect and respond to the historic architecture, but we are part of Grundy. Grundy is very characteristic of communities throughout the Appalachian region that have seen physical and economic declines over the last several decades. It's an unfortunate but very real fact that communities throughout the region have seen a decline and loss of their viability downtown because they can no longer compete in the marketplace as it's evolving now. We think that is an unavoidable consequence of the evolution of retail trade at the end of the century. Grundy is in a unique, literally one-of-a-kind position to be able to not only maintain and strengthen the historic part of the downtown, which is centered in the courthouse area, but to really literally reinvent itself in the commercial sense with a redevelopment plan that provides the type of retail office and service needs that the retailers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are demanding. Grundy can really reinforce the historic area of the community and make that perform better. At the same time, develop a new, strong, mixed-used area anchored by large retail tenants who can really make the community a much more attractive and successful commercial location within Buchanan County.

FS: I think the merchants are for it. I think a lot of them are just hesitant to say anything. I've had several people come up to me and say, "Well, I really hope you keep talking for this plan because I like it."

MS: We have an opportunity before us right now that most of the nation would love to have.

MS: These older buildings that's been here for fifty, sixty years, they're falling down. They're in a very bad state.

MS: They're full of asbestos. They're full of lead paint. They still have flood mud in them. The wiring is gone. The roofs are gone. We have no place to put new businesses. This just gives us an opportunity of hope, glimmer, and light.

FS: I think a lot of people are hesitant, I would be, on some of these buildings, to go in and do the necessary repairs to really make them where I would want to put a business in. Not only the cost, but when are we going to have the next big flood?

MS: They're not the greatest structures in the world. With the flood ordinates that's in place now, there's very little that can be done as far as expand the (tiers?), even if the owner wanted to do it.

MS: Naturally, I've got a lot of sentimental value. But after sixty-two years, I hate to see it torn down. But yes, for the progress of Grundy, I don't know for sure that we'll move, but we're willing to sacrifice the business.

FS: I don't have sentimental attachments to objects. My attachments are to people. I think that the new location, the way they've projected it, it'll be an affordable relocation.

FS: I've heard some that are opposed to it, I suppose because of their property. We've got property down there too, but I think it's going to be worthless if another flood comes.

FS: Of course, most of the other people, they don't want to really be inconvenienced with a four-

lane highway or relocating or whatever might be involved. But they have not been through the flood yet. They've never had the experience of being flooded, what it is to lose a lot, and see retirement washing down the [laughter] Levisa. I think if we have another big flood, Grundy will be gone then.

MS: There's no question, it's going to be a lot of disruption in the startup phases. We will lose some residents. Of course, we can ill afford to lose any residents. But I think we will get some people back. Maybe different people, but we will get some people back.

MS: I don't think there's any such thing as standing still. You either progress or if you try to stand still, time passes you by. So, you're actually going backwards.

MS: It could turn into a model town.

FS: Oh, yes. I'm for it, 100 percent. I feel like Grundy needs to be reworked and moved. There's nothing down in town to speak of, to me. I've lived here all my life.

MS: If you had shoveled as much mud as I shoveled in [19]77, you would understand why it does appeal to me. There will be another flood. If it happened in [19]57, [19]77, you're going to have another one. I shoveled enough to do me a while. Yes, I did. I sure did.

FS: I just hope that you all are going to be able to go ahead with the plan and give us some protection. I'm too old to clean it up again. We have depended on coal here so much in the past. Now the coal is practically gone. We've got to look for other things. I think it's going to open up more opportunities for more businesses. I see that it's a good shot towards revitalizing the whole county.

MS: No one person is to benefit out of this. The community stands to profit instead of a single person. The town belongs to the people. Really have a golden opportunity. Grab a hold of it. Let's go.

MS: As far as the Levisa River goes, I don't think anyone wants to take away its beauty. We don't want to try to take away its force. We don't want to try to take away its peacefulness. We have the opportunity to let her go on as she has for centuries and centuries. With the Corps of Engineer and their unique abilities to make things happen and change, we have an opportunity to put our town on the other side of the river, out of the bend of the river, out of the hundred-year flood plan, and develop something that no other town has had the opportunity to do. We have a golden opportunity to diversify, to rebuild, to make our town grow, to give us property that we never had before to develop, to give our children a future, and something to look forward to, hope to look forward to. For the residents that do live on the river, it gives them an opportunity, a chance to lay down at night and not worry about their businesses, not worry about their homes being flooded. I think the peace of mind that people will receive from this project is worth every penny you could put into it to protect not only homes, businesses, but also lives. To me, it's a blessing from God that we have it.

MS: I think this flood-proofing and new town planning will give people those reasons to stay at

home and develop our home again as a commercial center where we, the citizens who stay here, can buy the things that we need, enjoy the business life that we need to secure our own futures, financially, and give our children a reason to come back home after they're educated rather than go somewhere else and seek employment.

[end of transcript]